

**James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, March 15,
1804, from Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe
Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W.
Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson

London March 15th. 1804.

Dear Sir

I have yours of Jany. 8 by Mr. Baring who arrived lately in the packet. From the view I am able to take of the subject I am of opinion that my appointment to Louisiana will be incompatable with the duties I am to perform in this quarter. To conclude a treaty with this govt. or to make such an experiment as woud.. authorize me to say that one cannot be had, to regulate on just principles the points in question between the two nations, will require at least two months; to proceed to Madrid thro Paris, conclude a treaty with the minister of Spn. & return here, will consume six more; and to reach the U. States perhaps two more. If an experiment is made it ought to be a fair one so as to terminate, in case of success, for ever all points of controversy or likely to be so between the parties, or in case of failure to put them completely in the wrong. Perhaps it may require less time to adjust the business with both powers, but the presumption is otherwise. Under such circumstances it seems proper that I shod. pursue one or other of the objects only, and being on the ground, already charged with these duties, it is possible that some inconvenience might attend my withdrawing from it, especially in reference to this power at this moment. Several incidents have occur'd wh. however unimportant, or correct in principle, have nevertheless produc'd some sensation here. The rejection of the treaty lately formed by Mr. King, as is said to be the case, the proposition in Congress of some defensive measure against

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the impressment of our seamen, and the affair of Etiquette with Mr. Merry are of this kind. But the incident which produc'd that state of mind susceptible of irritation by light causes, was the adjustment of our affair with France, which this govt. did not expect, & has most probably subjected it to much embarrassment. To remove these impressions, and arrange our affairs with

this govt. on just & equal principles, in cases of necessary contact, or rather of actual collision, will require more time than the pressure of any other duty will permit, especially one of great expectation, a failure to perform which might compromit my friends as well as myself. I consider the affair with Spain as being likewise of importance, and am not without every sanguine hope of succeeding in it, in case I proceed thither. I have much reason to count on the strong aid of France independant of wh. I think our present attitude must be an imposing one there. I shall therefore make up my mind to pursue these objects with the attention they merit, and to give them the time they may require. With this power there will be some difficulty from the nature of the questions themselves, its pretentions & former practice in respect to some of them, and the expectation it has constantly fostered of holding a relation to us more close & connected, than comports with an adjustment which separates us for ever, and leaves the UStates to that high career which their destiny seems to promise. They must see distinctly that by separating ourselves from Europe, placing our maritime rights on a just footing, remaining neutral and respected, while they are at war, we must soon become one of the greatest, as we are the most interesting, & happiest of nations. Many circumstances have tended to convince me that they entertain very false impressions with respect to our growth, and that they view the rapid advancement we have made & are making with no very favorable eye. They seem to consider our prosperity not simply as a reproach to them, but as impairing or detracting from theirs. Without possessing the means of retarding it, but at the hazard of equal, perhaps greater danger to themselves, they have not yet attained that enlarged & liberal state of mind which inspires a desire to promote it. Thus I think that whatever accomodation is obtained, however just and fair the principle may be on which it is

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claimed, will be yielded with reluctance & slowly. It is not impossible that procrastination will be attempted from the consideration of what is to occur in the

UStates at the end of the present year, in the hope that something may result from it favorable to their views. In revolving this subject over I have sometimes doubted whether it would not be better for the present to leave the business her untouched, and attempt an adjustment of that with Spain first. It might give time for the passions, which have been improperly excited, by light causes, to subside, & in case of a favorable issue of a better prospect of success here afterwards. On the whole however, I am led to conclude that as it would be the most frank and respectful course of proceeding to this power, and at the same time most conciliatory, to commence here, to adopt that conduct which I shall accordingly do soon as I am prepared for it. To be thus prepared will not require more than a week or fortnight at most, when I shall ask an interview with Ld. Hawskesbury & open the subject to him.

In thinking of an appointment in Louisiana I did not contemplate the idea of having any thing to do with this power, and did hope that the business with Spain might easily be adjusted in time for me to reach the UStates in the course of the ensuing autumn. I found soon after my arrival here that it was not a situation in wh. I cod. promise myself any satisfaction, and was therefore desirous of extricating myself from it as soon as I cod. with propriety. The opinion wh. I entertained of the respect due to the office I held to the govt. & country I represented appeared to be different from that wh. was held on the same subject by this govt. & those in that circle. My visits to the ministers were not returned; I obtained a list of them of St. Stephen Cotterel & send my cards round, as I had been told by some foreign ministers was the usage, but recd. no acknowledgment of the attention. Suspecting that I ought to have gone in person I apologized for the mode to Mr. Addington, when I was presented to him at the levee, as I also did to the Ld. Chancellor

who assured me that the apology was due from them, since in fact it appeared that they had not known in what manner the visit had been made. I visited Ld. H. in person more

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than once & left my card, without receiving any return. I visited also Ld. Sallisbury the chamberlain to the King in the same manner & with like effect. My visit to Mr. Yorke who succeeded Ld. Hotham after my arrival here, was return'd, as was Mrs. Monroe's by his Lady. We were invited to dine with Ld. & Lady H, wh. we did; afterwards Mrs. M. called on Lady H. but here visit was not returned. As she had sent us cards to attend a presentation of colours the day before, and it was possible she might construe that visit into an acknowledgment of that civility. Mrs. M. made her another, wh. was also disregarded. All this preceeded the affair of Mr. Merry and had no connection with it. We have lately invited Ld. H & Mr. Yorke with their Ladies to dine with us in return for a similar attention recd. from them. The first refused an acct. of an engagmt., the second on acct. of a prior one. As the Affr. of Mr. Merry was known here when the invitation was given it is possible that that circumstance & the other intelligence recd. from him by the packet may have occasioned the refusal; tho' it may be that they wee engaged, and I am persuaded Mr. York really was. A second invitation from Ld. & Lady H was declined on acct. of a prior engagement or rather because Mrs. M's visit had not been returned with a view also to furnish an opportunity of paying them that attention before we recd. a second time. At Ld. H's table when speaking with his Lady, who appears to me to an amiable woman on the subject of our climate, of its variety &c. I mentiond that while the northern parts were perhaps in snow, the southern enjoyed the bloom of spring, that in Feby. at Charlestown I understand, they had the course, and from the want of other topicks of conversation, I added that on such occasions there was always a great concourse of people with gay equipage &c. Ld. Castleray asked me what kind of equipages had they; I cod. not but be surprised at the enquiry, nevertheless replied, such as I saw here. Sir. Wm. Scott then remarked, that he had lately seen

an account of a grand fete at the cape of good hope, wh. concluded with observing that all "the beauty taste & fashion of Africa were assembled there." This occasioned some mirth as you will suppose at our expense, in wh. I cod. not well partake, & in justice to Ld. H. it is proper to say that by his reserve he did not appear to think that the remarked was made

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on a suitable occasion. I was really embarrassed what part to take on the occasion. It was disagreeable to me to let it pass unnotic'd, but I could not well notice it, without appearing to be hurt at it, nor without throwing the company into some confusion. I was therefore silent. Shortly afterward, in conversing with >d. Castleray & some other gentlemen on the rapid growth of the UStates, I observed that I was astonishd to find persons of distinction by their offices & talents so extremely uninformed in that subject, as they were generally in this country: that in truth they knew as little of us as they did of the cape of good hope. At the dinner with Ld. H. Lady Bristol had precedence of Mrs. M. tho she was the wife of Lady H's brother, who had been lately under secretary of state only & thus held not other distinction than that of his title. When dinner was announc'd Ld. H. communicated it to Lady Bristol in a whisper who took the lead & Mrs. M & Lady H. followed, no one leading them. In talking with one or two foreign ministers on these subjects, as matter of inquiry, of what I might expect, rather than what had happen'd, I found that they knew as little about it as myself, and was led to believe that there was no fixd rule, & to presume that there was no disrespect intended us. In respect to the minister of other pwrs we appear to hold the lowest grade; in a diplomattick dinner at Ld. H.'s precedence was given, & apparently by design, to all the other ministers, and on more

occasions than one to the minster of Portugal, evidently by design. By this detail wh. I shod. most probably never have made the subject of a letter, had it not derived sufficient consequence by the affair with Mr. Merry, you will find that I was resolved not to suffer circumstances of the kind, to interfere in any degree, with the good understanding wh. I was very desirous of improving with this country. From what the King & his ministry had told me, wh. was afterwards repeated in a very formal manner by Mr. Merry, as he said by order of Hd. H. of the pleasure with wh. his majesty had recd. me here, I concluded, that I stood on the same ground with my predecessors, and though it better to be satisfied with it, than make it a subject of contestation esepcially at the present moment. By no act of my own however have I given a sanction to pretentions wh. I considerd degrading to

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my country. In my intercourse with the govt & with others, it has probably been seen that I neither felt or acknowledged any inferiority in a national or individual sense.

Another consideration wh. made me very desirous of withdrawing hence, is the enormous expence attending a residence here. It is fact that in all those articles wh. a family necessarily consumes a dolr. In the UStates is equal to a guinea here. In some articles the ratio does not apply; meals for example are generally not more than double here what they are there; poultry is quadruple what it is in Richmond; groceries are at least in that proportion; tolerable coffee is 7/ per pd.; wine & spirit in the same proportion fruit exceeds it. We assured that I had suffered enough by the suite of my former appointment to France not to have been sufficiently on my guard here. But not precaution can protect one against such charges. It is

I fear impossible to live here in a manner, wh. wod. not expose me to reproach, on the salary, and as I owe some money & am advancing in years, it seemed to be a duty wh. I owed to my family to withdraw from a situation wh. threatened to involve me in greater debt, with a view to devote the remnant of my active life to make provision for their advanc'ment and my comfort. Having as it were relinquished a second time the bar I saw some hasard in returning to it. The imployment adverted to seemed to be one, in which I might continue to serve my country, & in the mode you mention promote also the interest of my family. But that I see is altogether impossible & therefore relinquish the idea of it. Indeed I was not certain that it was practical at first, of wh. I became more doubtful afterwards, since I perceived many reasons why I shod. remain here thro' the next winter, as I intimated to Mr. Madison in a subsequent letter. On the subject of the outfit, I thought after the experience I had had, that an outfit to Paris was in itself reasonable, & might with propriety be allowed. There is an actual expense attending such a service wh. the annual compensation will not provide for. There is an equipment wh. the present style of that post requires, the want of wh. wod. have been notic'd in me & perhaps done harm, wh. will cost five or six hundred pounds. For an extry. mission an outfit, is a moderate allowance, with a quarter salary to bring him home. It is I presume less by what has been

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heretofore allowed. Had I been a resident minister with either govt. & transfer'd to the other an outfit woud. have been allowed. The reason appears to me to be stronger in favor of that allowance to one who leaves his home & affrs. who has to encounter the expence of equipment (I mean personal), after incurring a much

greater expence, in a much longer voyage. However on this point I wish nothing that is deemed improper or likely to expose my friends or myself to the slightest imputation of departing from a system economy wh. it is indispensably necessary in all future cases to observe. Having accepted a resident appointment here, made it seem necessary that I shod. remain longer than on experience I found comported with my interest or desire. It was that with other considerations wh. induc'd me

to suggest the idea to Mr. Madison of protracting my return untill the next year. Should I go to Spain be assured that I will do every thing in my power to execute a particular comn. wh. is suggested in yours. You cannot estimate too highly the propriety of due attention to that object. I shod. most probably have hinted some thing on that head heretofore had I not supposed you woud. have obtained due information from other quarters. I shall deliver the shortest letter to Mr. Williams & suppress the other. Mrs. M. has not injoyed her health well here, owing to the moisture of the climate. At present she is better. We are much gratified by the details you have been so kind as give us of our good neighbours, to whom be pleased to present our best regards. The establishment of the family of Trist gives us much pleasure. My recommendation of Mr. Skipwith to the collectorship at N. Orleans was made on the idea that Mr. Trist was provided another time. I shod. certainly recommend neither of those gentn. to employment at the expence of the other. I hope however something may be done for Mr. Skipwith in the quarter since he seemed disposed when I left France to move there in case he failed to obtain an appointmt. I shall reconcile him to what has occur'd. I am dear Sir very sincerely your friend & servt. Jas. Monroe

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PS. I took the liberty to mention Mr. Prevost in a letter sometime since to Mr. Madison in the hope that some attention might be shown him, if an opportunity offered.

RC (Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress).